

Bribery

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“In Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Greek, and Roman civilizations, bribery is frequently mentioned in both religious and legal texts. Even during the time of the pharaohs, bribery operated as a kind of underground economy. Indeed, the oaths of judges in Ancient Egypt were based on the principle of fairness and refraining from accepting bribes. The Code of Hammurabi contains articles on bribery. This demonstrates that bribery was a widespread practice, and that rulers attempted to prevent it. In ancient Greece, state officials and judges frequently faced allegations of bribery. Demosthenes was a prominent figure who argued that bribery threatened Athenian democracy. In the Roman Empire, there are numerous records of senators, governors, and generals accepting bribes and tributes to increase their wealth. Thinkers like Cicero stated that bribery was a danger that could lead to the collapse of the state. In ancient China, despite Confucian ethical principles, the culture of giving and receiving gifts among bureaucrats occasionally degenerated into bribery.

That day, it seemed inevitable that our old friend would lecture us at length on conscience and morality. I don't know whether Cicero's view that bribery was a danger that could lead to the downfall of the state was an exaggeration. But I can confidently say that our teacher's words broadened our horizons.

“In the Middle Ages, bribery was a part of the feudal system. Landlords and feudal lords frequently resorted to bribery to evade legal regulations and gain

special privileges. It was frequently used to influence the decisions of local rulers or lords. Gold given as a gift was a common practice that influenced lords' decisions.

“Even the Church was not immune to these influences. Indulgences were sold for money, so much so that even God's mercy through forgiveness of sins was marketed. Practices such as the sale of church offices were common among religious authorities. The Church was also affected by bribery scandals during this period.

I can't say whether the others around the table had experienced my premonitions, but I confess I felt a sense of apprehension that our teacher was leading us into dangerous territory regarding "changing behaviors and unchanging values." This anxious anticipation, however it may have been, suddenly gave way to an inexplicable bewilderment when the topic abruptly changed.

“Our hero got married in a magnificent wedding, typical of Easterners, lasting three days and three nights. He chose a famous historical castle that served as a luxury hotel for the wedding ceremony. The couple arrived there in advance for the essential photo shoot in a white classic car. Before the event began, guests were warned via email not to take photos and videos. To prevent any images from the wedding from leaking, attendees' phones were collected by staff for three nights. The wedding, which was closed to the outside world and therefore conducted with secrecy, attracted attention with its red-themed decorations, flamenco dances, and luxurious menu. The bride's wedding dress, signed by a world-famous designer, and the outfit she chose for the after-party, which cost 17,000 Euros, were the highlights of the evening, while it was revealed that the total cost of the wedding was a full

250,000 dollars. This astronomical figure sparked gossip in the tabloid world: "The groom has opened his purse again." The hall walls were covered with red fabric, associated with passion and love, while the flowers and tablecloths used in the decorations also dominated the color red. The night was attended by flamenco and modern dance groups. The dinner continued with performances. Guests were treated to a special menu. Starters included roasted shrimp, sweetcorn puree, Florida citrus, and grilled artichokes. Main courses included grilled sirloin, herb-crusted crab, Yukon mashed potatoes, scalloped mushrooms, and Meyer lemon béarnaise sauce. Alternatively, there was miso-glazed Atlantic salmon and lemon soy beurre blanc, and dessert included dark chocolate tart and espresso whipped cream.

"At events where celebrities were present, a dress code was implemented, with women required to wear a gown and men required to wear a tuxedo. Following the wedding ceremony, guests were hosted on a luxury boat.

Where are we going? I admit I'm having a hard time making connections. He's like a jigsaw puzzle piece, and nothing he's telling me is fitting. The old wolf continued his story, and I couldn't predict where it would lead.

"I think the grandeur of the wedding was extraordinary in its sheer magic. Among the guests were people from the other side of the world. A few of the groom's indispensable artist friends, who were part of his fondest memories of his time in music. At least one of these guests was probably thinking something like this that night."

"And here, on this humid night, I feel that all this splendor, reminiscent of a Simurgh bird carrying golden dust on its wings, is actually the echo of an emptiness.

Among the dancing shadows, one forgets this: Wealth and power cannot hide the truth."

I felt the solemnity on our old friend's face give way to bitterness for a moment. After a brief, imperceptible silence, all those complexities began to unravel.

"At that moment, I realized that, after all the deceptive charm of appearance, the truth suddenly became visible as the fog lifted. The lights dimmed, the colors dulled, and then everything faded to black and white, symbolizing the past.

"Zerger was detained, along with the sons of three ministers of that period, on accusations of giving bribes and engaging in smuggling. It was said that he breached sanctions imposed on our eastern neighbor through gold trade and money transfers, and conducted billions of dollars worth of illicit transactions via a state bank. While the stock market experienced sharp declines, the dollar and the euro rose. After the operation, the evidence became controversial, but its international dimension spread to the other side of the world.

"The indictment dossiers prepared about the ministers among the suspects were submitted to the Ministry of Justice to be sent to the Parliament. After the investigations, one of the ministers was removed from his post. The other three resigned from their ministerial duties. One of them, in a public statement, announced that he had also resigned from the parliament by criticizing the prime minister. However, in the vote conducted in parliament, it was decided not to refer the former ministers to the Yüce

Divan. Still, each of them had quotable quotes uttered about him.

"Every diplomacy is built upon a former silence."

"The ticking of the clock is heard most at night."

"Silence has now become a wall."

"Confession does not bring freedom."

The endless details of the event he mentioned were more than our attention and comprehension span could handle. The most prudent thing to do, as always, was to hang him on the gallows of oblivion. Yet the old man continued.

"Together with these, it was observed that several members of the party also resigned. In the following days, some information about the investigation file leaked to the media. According to this, it was claimed that the businessman Zerger was the key figure of the investigation, that he built relationships with four ministers in the bureaucracy and, through a bribe network, engaged in crimes such as money laundering and gold smuggling. It was also stated that in the investigation the accusations against the three ministers' sons involved "facilitating bribes, both taking and giving."

"With a decision taken one and a half months after his arrest, he and the minister's children, who were detained in the same operation, were released. In a 180-degree turn, the measures placed on Zerger's assets were lifted. In the same year, the investigation file was closed with a decision of non-prosecution. Only a year later, due

to outstanding performance in exports, he was deemed worthy of an award and received it from the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Economy. On social media, comments were made about the award ceremony photo, filled with witty quips reminiscent of Cyrano de Bergerac.

"-Everyone is so stylish at this awards ceremony, I think even the tuxedos are lining up to receive their awards!

"-The award is so heavy, it would fly off the stage if two people weren't holding it.

"-The 'Export Champions' awards ceremony or the 'Best Tie Adjuster' competition? This level of poise only exists in suit catalogs!

"-And now, four heroes who carry the country with their exports are coming on stage... but one of them is still looking, 'Is this award really ours?'"

"-This award isn't just for export figures... it's as if it was given for the tie line as well. A good stance, a good economy!"

"-The export champions are on stage... but all eyes are on the exchange rate."

"-The export champions have received their awards... but all eyes are still on the 'I wonder if there will be a tax cut this year?'"

"-Why all the serious poses... it's as if the foreign trade strategy is being announced, not the award."

"-The suits are full, the smiles are half-smiled... it's clear that diplomacy was involved as much as exports."

"-The stance on stage: 'We don't just export products, we export trust.'"

The subtle curves at the corners of his lips revealed the sarcastic smiles on my friends' faces at that unforgettable image in their minds, and were replaced by a serious expression.

"However, shortly thereafter, the deputy prime minister, for some reason, remarked something like, "If I had known who I was going to give the award to, I wouldn't have been in that photo."

"In those years, the embargo against our eastern neighbor aimed to halt nuclear activities, and for this reason, heavy sanctions were imposed on finance, energy, and trade. Consequently, it was largely excluded from the international banking system. Oil exports, the banking system, and the gold trade were at the center of these embargoes."

"Our country used methods like "natural gas for gold" to maintain trade with its eastern neighbor. A state-owned bank was the main channel for this trade with our neighbor. For this reason, its name was frequently mentioned in "1725." Businessman Zerger was at the center of the investigation during this period, accused of transferring money to the embargoed country and trading in gold.

"A month before the operation, the bank's General Manager held cooperation talks with the embargoed country. These talks aimed to further commercial cooperation with our neighbor's National Development Fund.

One of us asked what the "natural gas for gold" method was. Our retired professor, who usually leaves questions until the end of class, answered this time.

"The natural gas for gold trade was technically a method of circumventing the embargo. Sanctions against the embargoed party imposed serious restrictions, particularly regarding payment in dollars and access to the international banking system. However, this method was used as a legal 'gray area' by some countries. Our country would buy natural gas from its neighbor and deposit the payment in lira with a state-owned bank. Unable to convert these liras directly into foreign currency, the embargoed party would purchase gold and send it to other countries to obtain foreign currency. This method allowed the victim to indirectly obtain foreign currency that they were unable to access due to the embargo."

Our old friend stared at the cup of tea in front of him. But without pausing, he continued the increasingly complex story of the operation, which was reminiscent of a detective novel.

"A significant number of the judicial law enforcement officers and officers who executed the prosecutor's detention and court search warrants were reassigned, dismissed, and expelled by the Ministry of Interior. The prosecutor was first dismissed. A year later,

before being arrested, he fled the country. In a strange coincidence, a year or two later, the prosecutor of the court halfway around the world where Zerger, who had sparked tensions between the two countries, was being tried, was also dismissed at the behest of the country's president. However, while this situation sparked speculation in this country, considered the cradle of democracy, it would not affect the case.”

“Zerger's former courier and partner, known as Zerger, was at the center of allegations of gold smuggling and bribery. The interview, which named him, specifically addressed various statements and interviews he had given over a five-year period. All of this covered Zerger's trial on the other side of the world, operations to circumvent sanctions conducted through a state-owned bank, and allegations of bribery of officials. He was alleged to have carried money, gold, and documents in bags. This was part of a scheme between our neighbor and us, "oil and gas for gold," used to circumvent embargoes. The interview, conducted a year before the trials on the other side of the world by the courier, aimed to expose details of corruption investigations and generated significant repercussions in our country. It described how Zerger evaded sanctions through a state-owned bank. It alleged that billions of dollars were being transferred to the embargoed country through forged invoices under the guise of food exports, and that he was the one transporting this money and gold. In the interview, he claimed that Zerger had given 45-50 million euros to the economy minister and shoeboxes of money to the state bank's general manager. He also claimed that the then-Prime Minister was aware of the

scheme and had described it as "economic jihad." He explained that Zerger's commission was 8%, with half going to Zerger and the other half to politicians. After the interview, Zerger issued an official statement denying his business partner was a "slanderer and blackmailer." Zerger's lawyers announced that the courier's statements were fabricated and that they would initiate legal action. Allegations of censorship and oppression arose in the country; the interview was labeled a "conspiracy" by pro-government media.

We all remembered those days, like a movie. A world we live in, but whose characters we can never identify with.

"However, this interview became one of the key pieces of evidence in a case halfway around the world. Prosecutors used documents like bank transfers and letters to corroborate the courier's claims.

"By claiming, "I only know part of the process," the courier was hinting at a larger network. The interview escalated tensions between the two countries. The statements were used as evidence in the case involving the state-owned bank, and the bank was found guilty. Access to the interview was blocked in the country. The courier fled the country after being threatened following the interview and disappeared.

"Just a few months before the incident, which has been described as an "uprising" and "theatrical," Zerger, who had gone to the other side of the world with his

family, was detained by Customs and Border Protection at the airport, but his family was released. The arrest was based on a secret indictment, which carried a potential prison sentence of up to 75 years for various crimes. The case was heard in Federal Court. Prosecutors alleged that Zerger had transferred money to the embargoed country through a state-owned bank using forged food export invoices and deceived the country's banks.

For some reason, the question that had never occurred to me was whether Zerger could be a "lone wolf." Could all his "heroic deeds" or "mischief" be attributed to him? The answer to this question was not long in coming.

“Zerger, the elder, was considered by authorities to be his son's "invisible" supporter and, rather than being directly accused, was often cited as the architect of the family fortune. According to some allegations, this wealth was based on the management of funds belonging to the family of Iran's last shah. It was alleged that he played a role in the "sanctions circumvention networks" established by the former President, particularly during the period of Western nuclear sanctions. He was photographed with the former President's advisors at the opening of the family company, and the project was personally approved by the former President. He was active in areas such as gold refinery operations and the steel industry. This wealth was naturally linked to the underground economy, which relied on a bribery network.

“During the course of the case, the Treasury Department accused Zerger of violating sanctions and imposed a substantial fine for transactions conducted through a currency exchange in an Arab country. The fine was reduced to one-fourth after he cooperated with authorities.

“He became a citizen of our country by benefiting from the status of "exceptional persons" upon the instructions of the Ministry. Allegations were that millions of dollars in bribes were paid to the then-Minister of the Interior to secure this citizenship. It was reported that he settled in our country while his son was detained on the other side of the world and was following the case from there. There were rumors that he was living in our country with his wife and daughter.

“Zerger pleaded guilty to all charges and reached an agreement with prosecutors. This was a critical step in reducing his prison sentence and entering the witness protection program. The agreement was kept secret. During his testimony, he admitted to paying the minister a bribe of 45-50 million euros (in the form of a house, a car, and watches). He claimed that the prime minister knew about the scheme and approved it as "economic jihad." This, naturally, sparked a strong reaction in our country. He detailed the role of the state bank. More than \$1 billion was transferred to our eastern neighbor through forged invoices. Zerger said he confessed to take responsibility as quickly as possible and get out of prison.

“The testimony lasted four days. During cross-examination, the defense accused Zerger of being a 'liar' and a 'briber.' Following the plea agreement, he was released on bail. He was granted freedom of movement and kept in national police custody. The official sentence was not released; it was reduced due to his cooperation.

We were beginning to think we were nearing the end of the story, but we kept encountering overlooked details. But then, as if introducing a new topic, our old friend began a lecture on the legal and political aspects of human relations.

“When the law is silent, weapons speak.” Cicero emphasizes with this saying that when the law fails to establish order or collapses, power and political will come to the fore. “Politics must be the law’s best servant.” This saying suggests that politics must exist to establish justice and the rule of law. “Every law is a political decision.” This saying suggests that law is not an abstract and neutral phenomenon, but rather reflects the preferences, interests, and values of political actors. “Laws are like spider webs; flies get caught, but wasps pierce through.” This saying by Honoré de Balzac implies that the powerful and those with political influence can easily escape the constraints of the law, but the weak remain trapped by these constraints. It would be appropriate to consider what I will say next in the light of these words.

What crossed my mind was this: ‘It’s good you made this introduction, my old friend. But I’m frankly

worried about where you're going with these political aphorisms.'

"Zerger's confessions also included someone who strained international relations. The director of the state bank. This man was arrested in his own country and sent halfway around the world. What would have happened if he hadn't been sent? He could have been tried in absentia, and relations between our two countries could have been strained. International pressure could have been put on our country. Sanctions could have been imposed on the bank. On the other hand, his extradition could have been interpreted as a gesture of "goodwill" to soften potential sanctions against the state bank. He was extradited, tried, and sentenced to 32 months in prison. His trial was linked not only to his individual actions but also to the institutional and international network in which he was embedded. His trial was shaped by his contribution to the functioning of a system.

"Zerger claimed that the director knew the technical details of the processes and facilitated the process. This strengthened the claim that the director was "knowingly and willingly" part of the system. In other words, the criminal acts encompassed not only the actions he directly committed but also the processes he knowingly supported. The concept of "contributing to the operation of the system" in his trial actually encompassed a much broader scope. The director was part of this system; in other words, he was not alone. Prosecuting other individuals could have created a diplomatic crisis.

However, the director was prosecuted because he was accessible, had technical knowledge, and played an active role in the process. While his trial appeared to be a legal process, it harbored significant political sensitivity behind the scenes. When Zerger testified as a witness, he incriminated several high-ranking figures. However, the prosecutor's office did not take direct action against these individuals. This was interpreted as a political choice.

The "scapegoat" was likely the first thing on everyone's mind. A symbolic victim had been chosen to maintain social order. This comparison carried a meaning beyond his personal responsibility.

“The individual trial of the director temporarily prevented the bank from being directly targeted. This was considered a "balance policy" to avoid damaging the country's financial system. It was preferred that the trial be "effective but limited, not a mere spectacle." While this trial appeared to be a legal process, it was actually the product of a "quest for political balance." Although the criminal acts were not solely his, his prosecution punished "part" of the system—the rest seemed to be protected on diplomatic grounds.

"This case demonstrated not only whether an individual committed a crime, but also how the boundaries of the law are shaped by political realities."

“The issue was multifaceted. Even if the legal process is completed, a sense of "true justice" may not always be felt in the conscience of society. This reminds

us that law is not only a set of rules, but also an ethical system with a sense of justice.

"Can a citizen of one country be tried according to the laws of another? This raises questions about sovereignty and jurisdiction."

"Zerger's testimony as a witness not only changed the course of the case but also revealed its political and legal complexity. Essentially, the Zerger case clearly demonstrated that international law is not merely a set of abstract rules, but also a complex field where politics, diplomacy, and national interests intertwine.

"While legal bargaining is more often a mechanism seeking a win-win solution in an individual criminal case, political bargaining in international cases is a game played by states based on their sovereignty, national security, and diplomatic power. In such bargaining, legal rules are used as tools, and outcomes are often shaped by political rather than legal determinism.

Our retired friend's know-it-all nature thus shifted to the realm of international relations.

"States know a great deal about each other in diplomatic relations and intelligence activities, but this information is often concealed within 'strategic silence.'"

"States collect information about their allies and rivals at the economic, military, political, and personal levels. This information is obtained through secret services as well as open sources.

“This information is not used immediately because, in international relations, priorities such as 'maintaining balance,' 'increasing negotiating power,' and 'preventing crises.' Alternatively, a country may use this information when it wants to pressure another country, manipulate public opinion, or gain an advantage in the international arena. For example, a scandal is leaked to the media just before a negotiation. The information is retained as leverage.

“This is a form of 'diplomacy of silence.' Everyone knows each other's dirty laundry, but no one airs it right away. This is because 'covert balance' is preferred over 'open conflict' in international relations. Perhaps a figure like our hero, the handsome Zerger, was a man caught in the midst of such information.

In the late at night, before his eyelids, heavy with the fatigue of that glittering night, drooped, we, too, concluded the finale with a seemingly irrelevant ending, without understanding the allusion.

“The experiences astronauts have when looking at Earth from the International Space Station evoke a multitude of emotions and thoughts. This is often referred to as a ‘wide-angle view’ or ‘emotional shift.’ Realizing how fragile and whole Earth appears as that magnificent blue globe, beyond borders and conflicts, generates for many astronauts a ‘deep empathy and a wish for peace.’ Some of the astronauts who have experienced this have expressed their thoughts and wishes for world leaders. The common emphasis is ‘the necessity of cooperation and

finding solutions to global problems together.' They often expressed their wish that world leaders would also experience this 'wide-angle view' and better understand the holistic nature of the planet and the shared destiny of humanity.

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